

The Home

WHAT THE BARTENDER SEES

A Panorama of Human Nature Adrift

A young man with a cold face, much nervous energy, and a tired-of-the-world expression leans over the polished, silver-mounted drinking bar.

You look at him and order your drink.

You know what you think of him, and you think you know what he thinks of you.

Did you ever stop to think of *all the strange human beings* besides yourself that pass before him?

He stands there as a sentinel, business man, detective, waiter, general entertainer, and host for the homeless.

In comes a young man, rather early in the day.

He is a little tired—up too late the night before. He takes a cocktail. He tells the bartender that he does not believe in cocktails. He never takes them, in fact. "The bitters in a cocktail will eat a hole thru a thin handkerchief—pretty bad effect on your stomach, eh?" and so on.

Out goes the young man with the cock all inside of him.

And the bartender *knows* that that young man, with his fine reasonings and his belief in himself, is the confirmed drunkard of year after next. He has seen the beginning of many such cocktail philosophers, and the ending of the same.

The way *not* to be a drunkard is never to taste spirits. The bartender knows that. But his customers do *not* know it.

At another hour in the day there comes in the older man. This one is the fresh-faced, young oldish man.

He has small gray side whiskers. He shows several people—whom he does not know—his book of commutation tickets.

He changes his mind suddenly from whiskey to lemonade. The bartender prepares the lemon slowly, and the man changes his mind back to whiskey.

Then he tries to look more dignified than the two younger men with him. In the midst of the effort he begins to sing "The Heart Bowed Down with Weight of Woe," and he tells the bartender "that is from 'The Bohemian Girl.'"

He sings many other selections, occasionally forgetting his dignity, and occasionally remembering that he is the head of a most respectable home—partly paid for.

The wise man on the outside of the bar suggests that the oldish man will get into trouble. But the bartender says:

"No, he will go home all right. But he won't sing all the way there. About the

time he gets home he'll realize what money he has spent, and you would not like to be his wife. It won't be any songs that she'll get."

The bartender *knows* that the oldish man—about fifty-one or two—has escaped being a drunkard by mere accident, and that he has not quite escaped yet.

A little hard luck, too much trouble, and he'll lose his balance, forget that there is lemonade, and take to whiskey permanently.

At the far end of the bar there is the man who comes in slowly and passes his hand over his face nervously. The bartender asks no question, but pushes out a bottle of every-day whiskey and a small glass of water.

The whiskey goes down. A shiver follows the whiskey and a very little of the water follows the shiver. The man goes out with his arms close to his sides, his gait shuffling, and his head hanging.

It has taken him less than three minutes to buy, swallow and pay for a liberal dose of poison.

Says the bartender:

"That fellow had a good business once. Doesn't look it—does he? Jim over there used to work for him. But he couldn't let it alone."

The "*it*" mentioned is whiskey.

Outside in the cold that man, who couldn't let it alone, is shuffling his way against the bitter wind. And even in his poor sodden brain reform and wisdom are striving to be heard.

His soul and body are sunk far below par. His vitality is gone, never to return.

The whiskey, with its shiver that tells of a shock to the heart, lifts him up for a second.

He has a little false strength of mind and brain, and that strength is used to mumble good resolutions.

He *thinks* he will stop drinking. He thinks he could easily get money backing if he gave up drinking for good. He feels and really believes that he *will* stop drinking.

Perhaps he goes home, and for the hundredth time makes a poor woman believe him, and makes her weep once more for joy, as she has wept many times from sorrow.

But the bartender *knows* that that man's day has gone, and that Niagara River could turn back as easily as he could remount the swift stream that is sweeping him to destruction.

Five men come in together. Each asks of the others:

"What are you going to have?"

The bartender spreads out his hands on the edge of the bar, attentive and prepared to work quickly.

Every man insists on "buying" something to drink in his turn. Each takes what the others insist on giving him.

Each thinks that he is hospitable.

But the bartender *knows* that those men belong to the Great American Association for the Manufacture of Drunkards thru "treating."

Each of those men might perhaps take his glass of beer, or even something worse, with relative safety. But as stupidly as stampeded animals pushing each other over a precipice, each insists on buying poison in his turn. And every one spends his money to make every other one, if possible, a hard drinking and a wasted man.

You, Mr. Reader, have been all of these types and many others, have you not?

Why did you see them? What reason had you for seeing them?

The bartender stands studying the procession to destruction because he must make his living in that way. He is a sort of clean-aproned Charon on a whiskey Styx, ferrying the multitude to perdition on the other side of the river. But what is *your* business there?

You might as well be found inside an opium den.

The drink swallowed at the bar braces you, does it? If you think you need a drink, you *really* need sleep, or better nourishment, or you need to live more sensibly. Drink will not give you what you need. It may for a moment make your nerves cease tormenting you. It may do in your system for an hour what opium does in the Chinese for a whole day. But if it lifts you up high, it drops you down *hard*.

And remember:

There is no such thing as moderate drinking at a bar.

You *think* you can take your occasional safety and philosophize about the procession that passes the bartender.

But the bartender *knows* that you are no different from the others. They all began as you are beginning. They all, in the early stages, despised their own forerunners.

They were once as you are, and the bartender *knows* that the chances are in favor of your being eventually like one of them.

Even like the poor, thin, nervous drinker of hard whiskey, who once wondered why men drink too much.—New York Journal.

Charge not thyself with the weight of a year,
Child of the Master, faithful and dear;
Choose not the cross for the coming week,
For that is more than he bids thee seek;
Bend not thine arms for tomorrow's load,
Thou mayest leave that to thy gracious God.
"Daily" only, he saith to thee,
"Take up thy cross and follow me."

—Selected.